



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# Proposed Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish Fisheries Management Plan

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Version: public consultation



## Executive Summary

The Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) is one of 43 FMPs proposed around the UK set out in the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS). The plan has been developed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), in collaboration with scientists, regulators, Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies (SNCBs) and stakeholders to deliver long-term sustainable management of flatfish fisheries in the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) areas 4b, 4c and 7d in English waters over the next six years, in line with the objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020 and as required by the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-fisheries-statement-jfs>)

### What is an FMP?

Under the JFS FMPs will contribute to delivering the Sustainability and Precautionary Objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020. An FMP looks to build on the Fisheries Act 2020 Objectives through its vision of achieving environmental, social, and economic sustainability, in the fishery for the benefit of coastal communities and wider society. An FMP sets out a vision and objectives for the fisheries to deliver the above.

### Why an FMP for flatfish?

Flatfish fisheries in the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel are a commercially important group of species in the English Waters. They contribute socially and economically to the coastal communities. However, there is currently a variety of evidence levels across all the stocks and a need to ensure that the stocks are continuously fished within sustainable limits. This FMP will lay out the current flatfish management, the evidence available and sets the direction to ensure the long-term sustainability of the fishery, whilst contributing to environmental, social and economic sustainability.

### Vision and Objectives

This FMP sets out objectives to deliver sustainable fishing of flatfish, for which a number of approaches to management have been proposed. The plan also addresses the wider environmental impacts of the fishery on the marine environment and sets out plans to mitigate impacts. In summary, this FMP collates existing management measures for demersal non-quota species plus collated science and evidence, and highlights where gaps exist. The FMP proposes precautionary management measures in the short-term whilst more evidence is gathered, to protect the stocks that are potentially not being fished sustainably at present.

A summary of the objectives can be seen below, each objective has a summary of actions in order to achieve the objective.

**Evidence:**

- **Objective 1.1:** Develop an improved evidence base for quota and non-quota flatfish in the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel mixed flatfish fishery.

**Sustainable Fisheries:**

- **Objective 2.1:** Deliver effective management of the harvesting of flatfish stocks within the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel area.
- **Objective 2.2:** To support wider environmental sustainability by understanding how the fishing activities within this FMP impact on the wider marine environment and identify options to minimise negative impacts.

**Social and Economic:**

- **Objective 3.1:** To better understand the social and economic value of the fisheries to the coastal communities within the FMP area.

**Climate Change:**

- **Objective 4.1:** Explore options for mitigating risk onto the fishery from the changing climatic conditions.

## Actions

During this first iteration of the FMP the following management interventions have been recommended. These have been derived from stakeholder engagement and evidence provided by ALBs.

MCRS: lemon sole, turbot, and brill were highlighted as key FMP species requiring protection during the juvenile life stages of their development. Evidence underpinning the minimum size was gathered and expert advice sought on whether these would meet the intended outcome of protecting juvenile individuals up to the size of maturity and reproduction. The recommendation will be to first align with the IFCA measures, then look to adjust limits based on the evidence gathered in order to meet sustainability requirements for the fishery and the species.

Commissioning of data collation to better understand the status of Atlantic halibut: This FMP recommends that such work could be undertaken by the relevant ICES working group to better identify the stock unit in the North Atlantic, and once identified, work should be commissioned to develop a stock assessment.

Research and consider the re-opening of a survey for common sole in the Eastern channel, to address the evidence gaps around recruitment.

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The review of the joint Total Allowable Catch (TAC) management of lemon sole and witch, and turbot and brill, as joint TACs are not optimum for sustainable management of either species as it allows for the overexploitation of a stock, above the recommended MSY advice provided by ICES.

The review of the TAC management area of lemon sole, witch and brill as these do not match the ICES advice area for these species (the TAC management area for turbot matches the current ICES advice area). This again are not optimum for sustainable management as this can lead to overexploitation of the stocks.

This FMP is a first iteration and will be built upon during a formal review process, which will be at a minimum every six years.

## Acknowledgements

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